DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 014 JC 970 198

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TITLE Leadership from Afar: Distance Education and the Leadership Roles of Those Involved.
PUB DATE Feb 97
NOTE 8p.; In: Walking the Tightrope: The Balance between Innovation and Leadership. Proceedings of the Annual International Conference of the Chair Academy (6th, Reno, NV, February 12-15, 1997); see JC 970 185.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Planning; Community Colleges; Cooperative Programs; *Dental Hygienists; *Distance Education; *Interactive Television; *Leadership Qualities; *Leadership Responsibility; Program Development; *Shared Resources and Services; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS Wisconsin

ABSTRACT

In 1990, Wisconsin's Northcentral Technical College began exploring ways to share resources and faculty with other institutions in the state, developing the Multidistrict Dental Hygiene Program (MDHP). The MDHP delivers dental hygiene education through a network of interactive classrooms connected by fiber optics, involving 4 technical colleges, 20 faculty members, and 58 students. One of the participating colleges, Western Wisconsin Technical College, became involved in the MDHP as the result of a severe shortage locally of trained dental hygienists and the high costs associated with establishing its own program. In the program sharing approach, didactic or theory classes are delivered via interactive television, while cooperating districts teach the laboratory segments of courses. Key elements of this approach are well-trained liaison faculty at the cooperating districts and strong leadership to solve crises and logistical problems in the sharing process. Leaders are encouraged to use the Plan, Do, Act, Check (PDAC) model to ensure that a sound educational environment is maintained. This model emphasizes data collection in the Plan phase, the consideration of possible alternatives or solutions in the Do phase, measuring outcomes and expectations of the plan in the Check phase, and standardizing the method and creating future plans in the Act phase. Leaders in this new realm of educational delivery should be innovative and believe that distance education works. (TGI)

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ED 407 014

LEADERSHIP FROM AFAR:

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND THE LEADERSHIP ROLES OF THOSE INVOLVED

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Paper Presented at the
Sixth Annual International Conference for
Community & Technical College Chairs, Deans, and Other Organizational Leaders
February 12 - 15, 1997
Reno, Nevada

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Biographical sketch for **Antonio Re**, presenter of concurrent session:

Leadership from Afar:
Distance education and the
Leadership Roles of those Involved

Antonio is the program director of the dental hygiene in La Crosse, Wisconsin. He has held that position since August of 1994. Antonio is also a liaison faculty with the Multidistrict Dental hygiene program. (He will brief you on the Multidistrict program). Antonio is currently part of the Wisconsin Leadership Development Institute which promotes the development of educational leaders within the Wisconsin Technical College System.

Antonio studied dental hygiene at Erie Community College in Buffalo, N.Y . where he earned his Associate Degree in Applied Science. Antonio later attended the University of Buffalo and earned his Baccalaureate teaching degree in 1990, before moving to Wisconsin to complete his graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Interactive Television, one of a number of distance education systems, delivers instruction through the use of interactive classrooms. A teacher may be 150 miles from a distance learning site, yet instruction and learning are taking place. Shrinking resources and customer demand on public institutions for greater educational accessibility and availability are forcing paradigm shifts in the way instruction is transmitted and delivered. In the state of Wisconsin, the Multidistrict Dental Hygiene Program, a national model for **distance education** and **program sharing**, delivers dental hygiene education through a network of interactive classrooms connected by fiber optics across the state.

Distance education is rapidly becoming an alternative method of delivering educational programs in less urban or sparsely populated areas of the state where an educational need exists, but financial concerns or other factors block its implementation. Distance education is becoming a reality because the technology which drives it, is also improving. As this technology is incorporated in program sharing concepts, it makes possible the delivery of instruction to areas previously under served. In large urban areas this technological phenomena may not be as important. Yet, linking multi campuses and satellite facilities through interactive classrooms increases classroom availability to students, as well as enhancing a college's ability to serve the community.

Two of the key elements in the distance education equation are the changing market place and dwindling resources. Adult learners returning to school are looking to the educational institutions as business, and are demanding that the products these institutions offer become more user friendly. Distance classes are just one initiative under way to improve access, and to deliver a needed service. Moreover, the dwindling resources that threaten all public institutions nationwide are forcing educators to explore alternative methods of doing more with less. It should be clearly stated, however, that doing more with less does not mean compromising standards or lowering learner outcomes.

In the State of Wisconsin, distance education is an established part of the Wisconsin Technical College System's endeavor to fulfill its mission statement of delivering high quality education to all citizens. This initiative was substantiated when the technical college system formed a consortium with the university system and created a distance education network called WONDER (Wisconsin Overlay Network [for] Distance Education [and] Research). This Network has given both the university and technical college systems an alternative means of delivering education in a rapidly changing society. In Wisconsin, program sharing through interactive television is currently being advanced by health occupations. However, other programs are also sharing curriculums by utilizing the distance initiative. Indeed, program sharing through distance may be achieved by most instructional areas, provided that some fundamental building blocks are in place. Among these are leadership and vision. They stand in the foreground because effective guidance and vision are needed for any distance education initiative.

An example of an innovative educational model is the Multidistrict Dental Hygiene program that links together four distinct districts in the State of Wisconsin. The dental hygiene program originates from NorthCentral Technical College (NTC), in Wausau, Wisconsin. In 1990, NTC began exploring how it could better serve the larger state community by sharing its faculty and resources with other districts in the state. After

an initial exploration, including a need assessment survey by the cooperating districts, and consultation with leaders, three districts identified their willingness to participate in this project. The NTC dental hygiene program began offering its courses to two districts in 1993. And in 1994, another district joined the distance initiative, and the program now consists of four technical colleges with 20 faculty members, and a total of 58 students, throughout the Multidistrict community.

Distance education is dynamic, and program sharing is a fundamentally sound method for delivering instruction, increasing student enrollment, and helping communities obtain trained individuals to fill professional jobs. In La Crosse Wisconsin, a community of 52,000, Western Wisconsin Technical College (WWTC) identified the need to train dental hygienists locally because a severe shortage existed. Dentists could anticipate waiting anywhere from 6 months to 2 years before filling a dental hygiene vacancy. This resulted in lost revenue and lengthy waiting periods for routine maintenance visits by patients. Training dental hygienists locally with a traditional dental hygiene program was not an option for WWTC because of the high cost of dental hygiene education. However, through program sharing the cost of running the program was significantly reduced, and a plan was adopted to import education through the airwaves. This allowed the Western Wisconsin area to train dental hygienist locally as part of the Mutidistrict concept.

Program sharing through distance education made possible the implementation of a highly complex program with strict accrediting requirements. The Multidistrict dental hygiene program delivers high quality instruction and excellent graduates. The graduating statistics testify to overall academic achievement of the students. Last year alone the program boasted a 90% passing rate for the national written exam, and 90% passing rate in the practical regional exam. These numbers testify that distance education does not compromise standards, and that complex programs may be shared without loss of quality.

Naturally, there are skeptics who do not like the notion of distance education. For many, education is still taught with instructors lecturing to students using the same pedagogical paradigms they learned from. It is generally agreed that no machine can ever replace the human element and the need for the socialization process which occurs during learning. Distance education therefore does not completely replace on-site instructors. Cooperating districts hire their own faculty to deliver those segments of a course or laboratory which are better taught one on one. Didactic or theory classes are taught over interactive television (ITV) in a lecture format. This allows the nerve center of the program, (NTC) or originating site, to deliver their established curriculum. All of the lectures originate through ITV and allow a classroom of 58 students to interact with each other across the state.

In program sharing, cooperating districts teach the laboratory segments of a given class. These faculty members must be well trained and thoroughly understand the curriculum which they are asked to teach. Therefore adequate time for curriculum preparation must be allowed. Faculty calibration will also have to occur to ensure that the curriculum remains homogeneous. Moreover, adequate time may be needed by the cooperating districts to review, analyze, and assemble materials for instructional delivery. All of the above factors (and many more) need to be considered before program sharing

through distance education may occur, in order to avoid problems; such factors require. planning, insight, vision, and tenacity to pull together and put in place.

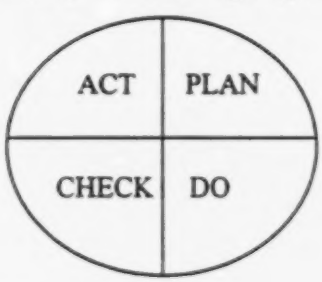
The importance of liaison faculty at the cooperating districts must not be under estimated. These professors become the human link in what may appear to be a mechanical classroom and learning experience. Liaison faculty play an enormous role in the delivery of the curriculum. The instructor spends all of his/her teaching hours with the students and delivers the critical hands on information needed to successfully pass the course and succeed in the program. Laboratories in occupational/professional fields are extremely important because they teach the psychomotor skills which students need prior to entering the work force.

Leadership is one of the elements which contributes substantially in this innovative project. Institutional leaders, division deans, chairs, and program directors all need to be part of a team which will facilitate implementation of the program. Leadership may have to come from afar to direct and problem solve situations, crises, and logistical matters as they arise in the process of program sharing.

Having a plan is one of the keys which will guarantee success. Transformational leaders are encouraged to use the ***plan, do, act, check*** **(PDCA)**[1] model to ensure that variables are covered for a sound educational environment. Pre-planning in any endeavor is extremely important in order to maximize potential and minimize waste. **PDCA** is not only essential in the early planning stages of program sharing, but also remains essential in an ongoing total quality control effort. Quality is a critical factor in distance education, especially for those programs governed by a licensure process and national accrediting requirements.

A carefully constructed ***plan*** will meet inevitable obstacles in an arena where little information is available and new ground is being forged. Therefore, ***do[ing], check[ing]*** and ***act[ing],*** on a course of action will be essential in successfully implementing a distance education program.

The model is illustrated by the following diagram:



The ***Plan*** collects data and determines the actions to be taken. Collecting data in this case may be as simple as checking what distance capabilities are already in place in an institution, or what equipment must be purchased to upgrade a system. Or it may be as

[1] Joiner, B. (1994). *Fourth Generation Management.* New York: Mcgraw Hill

complex as what is the best technology to use to deliver distance classes, etc. Each plan will have its own unique characteristics.

The ***do*** quadrant refers to considering possible alternatives or solutions which may be needed, based on the information derived from the plan. Moreover, the ***do*** implements some of the solutions of the plan. For instance, if a plan calls for exploring new technology, then "doing" means considering the technical alternatives which best meet the need of the institution.

The ***Check*** in this model refers to measuring the outcomes and expectations of the initial plan. The check section summarizes implementation results and analyzes comparative data. This section allows leaders to evaluate both their data and their plan before taking further action.

The final quadrant ***Act,*** can be viewed as two phases in which a method is standardized and the creation of future plans put into place. For instance adopting fiber optic ITV technology over compressed video for distance classrooms. The standardize method invites the transformational team to train those involved in the new method and to put in place control mechanisms to guarantee that the overall plan will succeed. Creating future plans falls under the category of total quality management, where the team assesses the success of the overall plan.

As with any plan, revisions will be needed, and must be expected. The value of using this type of model is that teams become leadership entities. This type of program requires enormous amounts of energy and vision to put in place, and the expertise of many individuals will be needed to make a good transformational leadership team. This team (which may vary in size depending on the institution) will lead the initiative forward and become the foundation and resource for future distance education and program sharing initiatives.

Leadership in this new realm of educational delivery will also be new and innovative. The standard leadership paradigms will not be adequate to meet the challenges associated with distance education. Therefore, institutional leaders will have to know when to let others lead and know when to step back in order to help the process move forward. Once a plan has been developed and put in place, others will need to step forward and in order to make the whole thing work. In truth it will be the work of many invisible leaders that will make (and makes) distance education work. Such support personnel may include engineers, technicians, educators, and support staff.

Leadership in this new area will come from those who believe that distance education works and that it is a cost effective method of reaching students or helping other districts meet the challenges of the 21st century. Transformational leaders have the vision to make things happen and are able to step out of the traditional paradigms and take chances. Resistance to change will come in many forms and wear many disguises; therefore, leaders will need to overcome numerous obstacles. One of the biggest battles that will be fought in this changing environment will come from educators because we value the nurturing relationships which are established in a classroom and fear that such relationships will no longer be attainable. However, in a distance classroom, different types of friendships are formed and the value of that relationship is equally as important.

Teachers in this program sharing concept become true transformational leader because of the innovation needed to be successful. Clearly, teaching across many miles

presents new challenges, but also presents new rewards as well. As the future of interactive television becomes more widely used throughout the country, dissertations and books will be published on the subject. It may suffice to say, for now, that those of us who are pioneering the work are looking very critically at our efforts. We are building on the strengths and eliminating the weakness as they become evident. Utilizing the model outlined above, Multidistrict college committees or leadership teams are working extremely hard to make the learning experience for students as enriching and meaningful as possible.

The potential of distance education is unlimited because technology is rapidly improving and changing in this field. We are told that in the future teaching institutions, both public and private, will need to be aware of the competition coming from private software companies, or the film industry, which may threaten the way education is delivered. If this is true than all of us need to change the way we think and the way we see information or knowledge transmitted.

Distance education is a phenomenon which will keep drawing attention as more and more people become aware of it, and as more institutions deliver instruction this way. Programs may be shared in an equitable manner which does not compromise program integrity or knowledge. ITV classrooms with 58 students connected throughout the state are much more enriching than a single classroom with 28 individuals. Think of the dynamic exchange which can take place in a classroom of this caliber when students from many different places in one state become friends and colleagues.

Innovation and vision are fundamental building blocks for change. Indeed, they are the machinery which drives change. In a time of rapid economic, social, and technological changes, vision and guidance are needed more than ever to allow room for educational growth to occur. Transformational leaders will plan, do, check, and act accordingly to ensure that their institutions remain centers where learning is not stagnant but rather always moving forward.

Distance education does not solve all of the problems or meets all of the needs of every student. It does however, move in the direction of offering classes and programs which otherwise would not be possible.

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